

# Covert Mapping the Ottoman Empire: the Career of Francis Maunsell

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**Abstract.** British military mapping in the Ottoman Empire started in the 1840s when Britain intervened to support the Empire in the conflict with Mehmet Ali, Pasha of Egypt. Further mapping was carried out during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877, when British surveyors under Colonel Home surveyed the approaches to Constantinople partly in anticipation of a need for the British to intervene militarily in support of the Ottoman Empire. Following the war, Home argued that Britain should instigate a mapping programme in the Ottoman Empire in anticipation of the need to intervene in any future conflicts between the Ottomans and the Russians. The British Treasury refused funding for the mapping, but the presence of British officers under Charles Wilson involved in reforming the Ottoman Gendarmerie, gave them the opportunity to commence covert mapping.

A leading figure in subsequent covert mapping activities was Francis Maunsell, who used the cover of his role as a Military Attaché, or as an archaeologist to survey and map large parts of Eastern Anatolia. Based on his covert activities, in 1893 Maunsell produced a "Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia" which provided the geographical information needed by any force wishing to deploy in the area. Subsequently, Maunsell was able to draw on his own work, and that of the former military advisors to compile a 1:250,000 map of "Eastern Turkey in Asia" (IDWO 1522). These maps were unusual in being compiled in anticipation of a future need to intervene in support of the Ottomans against a Russian incursion through the Caucasus, whereas most previous British mapping was prepared in the face of an imminent threat. He was later employed in carrying out a survey of the railway between Haifa and the Hijaz Railway. This paper will discuss the work of Maunsell, and the maps he produced in the context of the political tensions of the time.

**Keywords:** Covert Mapping, Maunsell, Ottoman Empire

## **1. Introduction**

Throughout the nineteenth century the British Government was keen to counter any threats to its perceived interests in the Middle East. Initially they intervened against Napoleon and subsequently in the 1840s when the Pasha of Egypt, Mehmet Ali advanced into the Levant. This was the occasion for the first British military mapping of the region (Jones 1973). However, for much of the nineteenth century the British government was mainly concerned about the threat posed to its imperial interests in India from an expansionist Tsarist Russia. Although Britain only went to war with Russia once, during the Crimean War, it also threatened war in 1877 in response to the Russian advance on Constantinople during the Russo-Turkish War. As part of Britain's assistance to the Ottoman Empire during the war, a group of British Royal Engineers were sent under Colonel Robert Home to prepare the defences of Constantinople.

Following the end of the war, Home wrote a memorandum draw attention to the lack of British mapping of Asia Minor and to the need for such mapping should the British need to intervene in future (Home 1878). Although Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister approve of Home's plan, the Treasury was not prepared to finance the necessary survey, and the scheme was dropped. However, the appointment of Consuls and Vice-consuls in Anatolia and Kurdistan meant that the British were able to maintain a presence in the region. In addition to the normal function of consuls, a group of officers under the Consul General, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Wilson, were charged with reforming the Ottoman administration and the Gendarmerie. Wilson had been head of the Intelligence Department, and the officers selected to work under him, Trotter, Stewart, Chermiside, Kitchener, Everett, Clayton and Bennet all had intelligence connections or were formally part of the Intelligence Department. Wilson was reassigned to Egypt in 1882, but a number of his officers stayed on in Asia Minor for a number of years, Everett serving as consul in Kurdistan until 1887. They were joined by new appointees, amongst them was Francis Maunsell.

## **2. Francis Maunsell as intelligence officer**

Almost inevitably, it is very difficult to reconstruct the career of Francis Maunsell as an intelligence officer. Officially, he was an officer in the Royal Artillery, who variously served as a vice-consul or military attaché in the Ottoman Empire. Much of what we know of his activities comes indirectly through a study of the surviving maps that he surveyed and compiled. His official correspondence with the Foreign Office reveals very little of his

work as vice-consul, although his claims for expenses incurred while travelling in Kurdistan and Anatolia indicate that he had a peripatetic existence.

The bare facts are that he was born in Limerick in 1861, coming from an Anglo-Irish family, and was educated at Cheltenham College, before going to the Royal Military Academy Woolwich and being commissioned in the Royal Artillery. In 1885 he conducted a survey of Gibraltar and adjoining territories, which was published by Intelligence Division, War Office in 1895 (TNA MPH 1/430). His first known intelligence work was between April and October 1888, when he travelled through Mesopotamia, Kurdistan, North-west Persia and Luristan collecting information on settlements and routes. His report on this work was published 1890 by the Intelligence Branch in Simla (Maunsell 1890).

Maunsell next crops up in the correspondence files in the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) when, in 1892, he wrote to the Secretary, Scott Keltie, requesting the loan of a Hadley six-inch sextant with artificial horizon, a half chronometer and two aneroid barometers for use in Armenia. His request was supported by a letter from Colonel J.C. Dalton, an officer in the Intelligence Division of the War Office and Council member of the RGS. Significantly Maunsell asked Keltie that his travels in Armenia be kept confidential (Maunsell, 1892).



**Figure 1.** Photograph of FR Maunsell taken following his graduation from Staff College (courtesy The Royal Artillery Institute Library Woolwich).

In September 1897 Maunsell was appointed Vice Consul in Sivas. In 1898 he moved to the Consulate in Trebizond and later to Van. While at Sivas Maunsell wrote again to Keltie concerning his exploration of the Niksar country:

*Please do not publish any remarks on my movements as the Turkish Government is so particular they might take the subject up if they thought I was exploring the country. They imagine that between exploration and annexation is only a very short step.*

(Maunsell 1900a)

In another letter he has to report the loss of the RGS sextant when attacked by robbers near Elk south of Lake Van. With typical Victorian understatement Maunsell describes how when attacked by 100 thieves his escort of Zaptecks flee leaving only Maunsell and his dragoman to defend their persons and baggage. Maunsell managed to make good his escape with his wounded dragoman, but his baggage was lost. The Turkish authorities managed to recover the baggage, but the robbers had apparently removed the telescope from the sextant. Maunsell, however, writes:

*It strikes me that the Turkish official who of course saw the instrument when they recovered the baggage from the Kurds and guessed what it was disabled it on purpose to prevent my taking further observations.*

(Maunsell, 1900b)

These letters shows that Maunsell was acutely aware of the political sensitivity of the type of survey he was undertaking. The supportive network offered by the RGS implies that they too saw such work as a valid expression of imperial concern and duty. The letters also illustrate the accepted knowledge that each side in the 'game' knew that the others players were aware of their tactics. The excursion of Maunsell into Turkish territory at this time is a particularly good illustration of the nature of this interplay as Turkey was meant to be an ally and be under British protection at the time. Suspicions of even allies in strategic regions were not, it seems, unfounded.

Public exposure of activities such as Maunsell's as direct government acts was, however, unacceptable. The complex web of informal networks that provided Maunsell with his equipment from the RGS also provided the opportunity to dismiss the individual if caught in the region. Maunsell could be dismissed as an over enthusiastic amateur borrowing equipment from little more than a gentlemen's club rather than an individual undertaking important strategic work. Maunsell's own public account of his travels (Maunsell, 1894) maintains the image of a 'jolly' journey of exploration. No mention is made of the clear strategic benefits of his survey, nor the War Office interest. Likewise, the format in which Maunsell collected his data was ideal for military application. His format, the type of data collected and the interpretations provided were all military in orientation and followed a well established model. Brackenbury (1874) had suggested a form of route description based on that used by the Austrian armies. This had been translated by the War Office into the '*Precis of Information concerning Trans-Caucasia*' in 1885. A similar format was used by Huntington in his travels and data from his reports was incorporated into Maunsell's revision of *Volume IV: Middle Euphrates Valley, Country from the Gulf of Alexandretta towards Erzerum and Bitlis*. The similarity is striking were it not for the

close contact between Huntington and the RGS which included letters of recommendation and introduction by the latter for the former on his travels. The military nature of Maunsell's work is further illustrated by his work *'Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia'* (Maunsell, 1893). This secret report based on his 1888 and 1892 journeys provides a detailed military geography of the strategic area between the Russian Caucasus and the Persian Gulf. Examples of the military interpretation of his observations abound such as those below:

The road from Rize to Erzerum, for example, is described as *'a fair mule track, but it could not be improvised into a road fit for guns in any reasonable length of time'*.

*'from Ezerum plain to Otli are two routes through the Gurji Boghaz, which become rough tracks as they approach Olti, and would take at least a month to make fit for guns'*. Delibaba defile is described as *'an important passage from a strategic point of view, the possession of which is of great value in a campaign. A force holding the pass acting against an advance from Russia, has the advantage of interior lines'*.

For Samsun on the Black Sea he describes the defenses as *'100 men and a battery of six 7-cm Krupp fieldguns behind a low earth rampart 6 feet thick facing the sea'*. Maunsell (1893)

In 1901 Maunsell was appointed Military Attaché in the British Embassy in Constantinople from where he directed the efforts of honorary attachés, such as Mark Sykes, Aubrey Herbert and George Lloyd, as well as professional agents, such as Colonel P.H.H. Massy, who travelled widely in Kurdistan and Anatolia between 1893 and 1903. In addition, he could call on the services of Harry Pirie-Gordon, and archaeologist working for the Admiralty and Captain Smith of the Royal Engineers (Winstone 1982: 7-8). Maunsell stayed in Constantinople until 1905, working on the secret *Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia*, the *Report on the Syrian Railways*, the *Military Report on Asia Minor*, and the *Military Report on Syria*. It was also while he was in Constantinople that he started work on his best known series of maps, IDWO 1522 Eastern Turkey in Asia.

In 1905, following a change in British policy towards the Ottoman Empire, he was sent as a staff officer to the Gendarmeries in Macedonia (Winstone 1982: 8). Between 1907 and 1910 Maunsell was back in London, working for the Director of Military Intelligence as an expert on the Ottoman Empire.

With the outbreak of war in 1914 Maunsell's knowledge of the Ottoman Empire was in great demand. He appears to have spent most of the war, and also several years after the war as an advisor to Military Intelligence 2, the section charged with gathering information on the Ottoman Empire. An extensive correspondence between Maunsell and MI2 is preserved in the

National Archives in which he not only provided geographical information, but also advocated the establishment of an independent Kurdish state

### **3. Maunsell as cartographer**

In his early work in Gibraltar, Maunsell seems to have only worked as the surveyor for the map subsequently printed by the Intelligence Department. The map was never allocated an Intelligence Department War Office (ID-WO) designation and only published about ten years after Maunsell's survey, and following some revision. Maunsell's real contribution to cartography starts with his deployment into the Middle East and Western Asia. Initially, these were often little more than sketch maps made while on his travels through the regions, but by the mid 1890s they were increasingly finished maps utilising both his own observations and those of other intelligence officers who had travelled there. As with his work for the military reports, the main focus of his cartographic work was communications.

The earliest map so far identified for which Maunsell was the acknowledged author was a 'Map illustrating journey in South East Turkey in Asia and Persia', which formed part of Maunsell (1890). As with a number of his subsequent maps, this one was not produced for wide distribution. A copy is recorded in the 'Confidential Catalogue of Maps' compiled by the Intelligence Division of the War Office between 1870 and 1944 (TNA WO 408/38). The Confidential Catalogue remains the best source of information on Maunsell's maps as so much of his work was never intended for publication. Jewitt (1992) records just five maps or series compiled by Maunsell, IDWO 1058, 1059, 1060, 1522 and 1736, whereas the Confidential Catalogue lists at least 52 maps for which Maunsell is identified as the author. However, while the Confidential Catalogue is the best source of information on Maunsell's cartographic work, it also makes very sorry reading as it records that many of his maps were destroyed as part of a weeding exercise carried out in the 1930s. The next map identified as being authored by Maunsell is a case in point. In 1892 Maunsell produced a 'Sketch Map showing Strategical Position in Central Kurdistan and communications leading to it' at 1:3,000,000 for the Intelligence Branch in Simla. The War Office copy is recorded as having been destroyed in June 1932.

In 1893 Maunsell compiled a three sheet series 'Map illustrating travels in North Turkey in Asia', 'North-East Turkey in Asia' and 'South-East Turkey in Asia' at 1:506,880 (or 1 inch to 8 miles), and 'Route traverses in Eastern Turkey in Asia June to October 1892' at 1:126,720 (or 1 inch to 2 miles). Both of these maps were subsequently used by Maunsell in compiling ID-WO 1522. Although these maps were confidential, the results of Maunsell's

work were not all kept from the wider public, as many reduced scale versions were published to illustrate the papers written by Maunsell for *The Geographical Journal*, the journal of the Royal Geographical Society (for example Maunsell 1894).

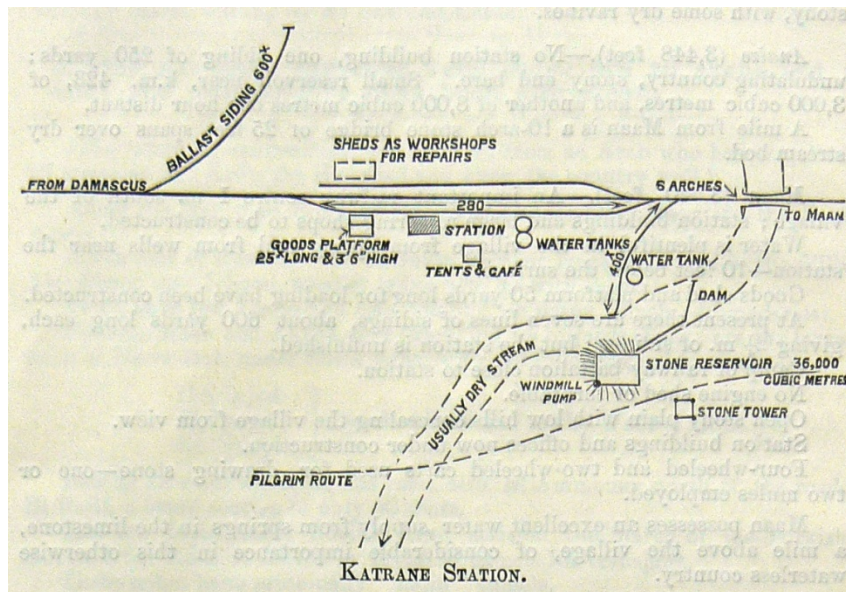
The major cartographic work of Maunsell in the early 1890s was associated with his 'Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia' (Maunsell 1893) for which he compiled 22 maps (IDWO 1058, 1059, 1060, 1061 and 1062a to 1062r). As noted above only three of these sheets were credited by Jewitt (1992), although the Confidential Catalogue makes it clear that they were all the work of Maunsell. This may be due to Jewitt only attributing to Maunsell those maps on which he was clearly identified as the author, or he may not have had access to the Confidential Catalogue, which only entered the National Archives after Jewitt compiled his book.

In 1895, Maunsell compiled four maps 'Country from the Black Sea to Sivas and Erzerum', 'Central Kurdistan', 'Country North of the Persian Gulf' and 'Country from the Gulf of Alexandretta to Erzerum and Bitlis'. All of these maps were designed to supplement those produced for the 'Military Report' and revised versions were included in a later edition produced by the War Office in 1903.

The production of the 'Military Report' and its accompanying maps demonstrates the continuing British fear of a Russian invasion of the Ottoman Empire through the Caucasus aimed either at the Mediterranean in the Gulf of Alexandretta or the Persian Gulf. At that time the assumption was that any British response would involve a landing in the Gulf of Alexandretta and Maunsell's reports and maps were designed to facilitate such a landing. Subsequently, with the building of the Hejaz railway, British intentions changed and attention was focussed on the possibility of a British landing in Haifa Bay and a subsequent advance towards Damascus along the light railway running through the Emeq Israel and up the Yarkon to join the Hejaz railway. The report Maunsell (1905) produced is copiously illustrated by sketch maps of the stations and sidings (See Figure 2).

Maunsell also included sketch maps of important stretches of the railways (see Figure 3), cross-sections and detailed drawings of the permanent way, track fittings, bridges and some topographic sketches. In addition to his abilities as a surveyor, Maunsell was competent at topographic sketches. Very few illustrate his early reports, but he was subsequent to include many, which must have been made in the 1890s, to illustrate his later reports to MI2 produced during and just after the First World War (see, for example 'Routes inland from Trebizond' Maunsell 1919).

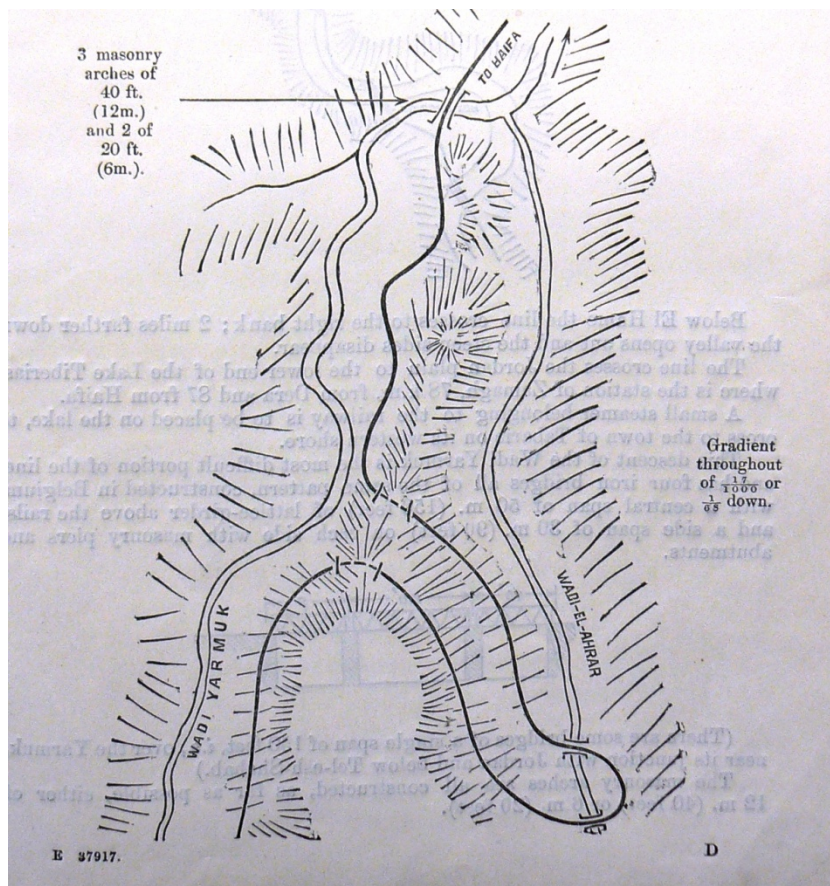




**Figure 2.** Sketch map of Katrane Station from Maunsell (1905)

Jewitt (1992) refers to IDWO 1522 as an ‘important series’ covering a strategically sensitive area. It is also a very attractive series (see Figure 4). Unfortunately, we do not know with any certainty when Maunsell started on this series. The Allocation Books’, which would tell us when production started, only exist from IDWO 1827 onwards. The ‘Register of G.S.G.S. Maps’ (TNA WO 408/12) tells us that it cannot be any earlier than late 1900 as the designation IDWO 1520 was allocated to a map illustrating ‘Operations VIII Division’ between May and August 1900. As Jewitt (1992) notes, Maunsell’s sources indicated on the maps date from between 1869 and 1900. The detailed listing of sources on maps was an innovation of Colonel James Dalton when in the Intelligence Division in the early 1890s, when he also recommended the practice to the Royal Geographical Society (Dalton 1892). Among the many sources drawn on by Maunsell were the results of his own surveys, including triangulation and reconnaissance surveys between 1892 and 1899, surveys by Wilson’s Vice-Consuls including Stewart, Chermiside, Everett, Clayton and Bennet. Other military sources included Captain W.J. Anderson, Lieutenant J.J. Leverson, Lieutenant Picot, Colonel M.G. Gerard and Colonel M.S. Bell. In addition to the military sources, Maunsell also used data derived from a number of civilian Vice-Consuls and the American Geographer Ellsworth Huntington. Some sheets, such as Sheet 7, Kars, were based on Russian maps, or made heavy use of Russian mapping. Given that the circulation of Russian maps was normally highly restricted, these maps could only have been acquired covertly. Some published mapping by companies, such as Kiepert was used where it was avail-

able. The oldest source used was Heinrich Carl Haussknecht (1838-1903), a pharmacist and botanical collector who travelled widely within the Ottoman Empire in search of plants, although the date cited by Maunsell, 1869, must relate to the date of his expedition, as the publication date for the account of his travels is 1882.

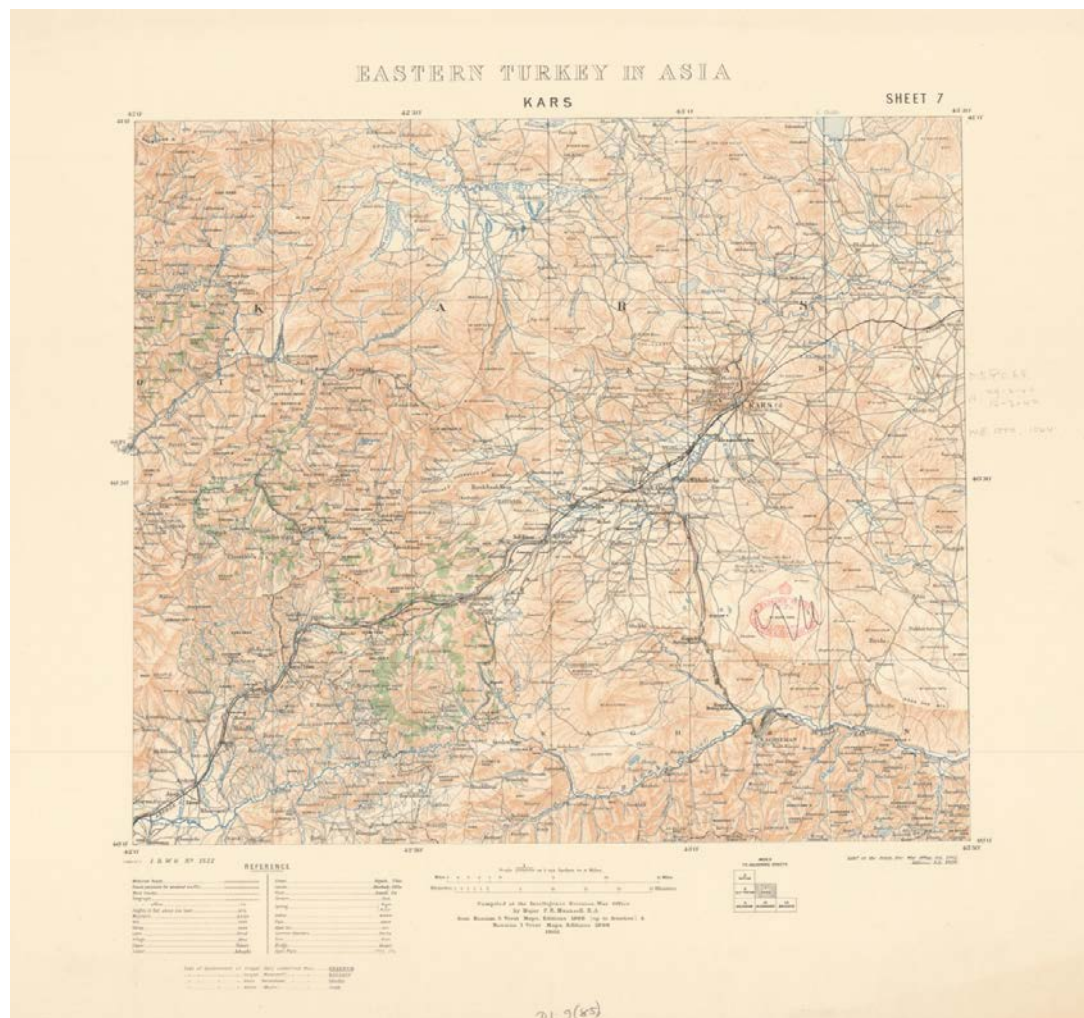


**Figure 3.** Sketch map of the railway in Wadi Yarmuk from Maunsell (1905)

The initial production of IDWO 1522 finished when it had reached as far south as Baghdad on the Tigris, coverage on the Euphrates stopped further north, south of a line between Antioch and Mosul. Production for this initial series took about two years with the maps having printing dates of 1901 or 1902. Some sheets were subsequently revised as new information became available, but with the changed geopolitical situation in Europe following the formation of the Triple Entente, the threat from Russia had disappeared

and the maps no longer had any priority. Following the outbreak of the First World War and Turkey's entry on the side of Germany in late 1914, Maunsell returned to the Intelligence Department to extend the coverage south of Baghdad and to cover the Euphrates. The whole series was also revised during this period.

Between his work on the first block of IDWO 1522, and its subsequent extension more than 12 years later, Maunsell had been engaged in mapping in parts of Turkey in Europe, mostly published in 1909. Winstone (1982) states that Maunsell retired from the Army following his service with the Macedonian Gendarmerie in 1905, in which case he must have been carrying out this work as a civilian.



**Figure 4.** IDWO 1522 Eastern Turkey in Asia sheet 7, Kars.



## Maunsell's subsequent career

Maunsell returned to the War Office following the outbreak of the First World War, and seems to have continued to act as an advisor to MI2(b), the section of Military Intelligence charged with collecting geographical intelligence on the Ottoman Empire, into the early 1920s. In addition to providing information on communications and defence lines, he was a strong advocate of the establishment of an independent Kurdish state as part of the post-war settlement.

Maunsell also carried out some cartographic work for the Royal Geographical Society during the war, for which he requested payment (Maunsell 1921). The request was denied on the grounds that extent of his contribution to the map of Eastern Turkey and Western Persia was disputed and that there had not been separate budgeting. The request seems to suggest that Maunsell had fallen on hard times and needed the money. When Maunsell died in 1936 there was no obituary in the *Geographical Journal*, as might have been expected, just a brief mention in the Presidential Address of 1937. For someone who had given long service to the Society, and had served on its Council, this seems strange. A possible explanation is that he was suspected of sexual improprieties with locals in Turkey (Mumford personal communication). Whatever the circumstances, Maunsell deserves to be better remembered as an important figure in the covert mapping of the late nineteenth century.

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